

RALLUS PECTORALIS: Cuv.



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Pectoral Rail.

Rallus pectoralis, Cuv. in Mus. Paris.—Less. Traité d'Orn., p. 536.

Kûl-lee of the Aborigines of the lowland districts of Western Australia.

Land Rail of the Colonists.

THE Pectoral Rail is a summer visitant to New South Wales, but if we regard the Rails from Southern and Western Australia, which are rather smaller and have somewhat more attenuated bills, as mere local varieties, the above remark will extend to the southern portion of the continent generally; in fact it may then be said to be dispersed over the whole of this part of the country, in all situations suitable to its habits. It usually makes its appearance in New South Wales in the month of August, and retires again in February; the extent of its range northwards, however, I have not satisfactorily ascertained; for although I have specimens from the north coast and Raine's Islet, they present sufficient differences in their form and markings to warrant the supposition of their being a distinct species.

In habits, actions and general economy the *Rallus pectoralis* closely assimilates to the Land Rail (*Ortyometra Crex*) of Europe; grassy flats between the hills and humid places covered with dense herbage being the localities favourable to its mode of life. It has the same indisposition for exposing itself to view, the same manner of eluding pursuit by running through the grasses, and when forced to quit its retreat flies low, straight, and with the same flapping motion of the wing.

The eggs, which are placed on the ground, are four or six in number, of a cream-colour, with numerous large irregular blotches of dark chestnut-red at the larger end, and a few smaller ones distributed over the remainder of their surface; they are one inch and three-eighths long by one inch broad. It breeds in September, October and November.

The stomach is very muscular, and is usually found to contain portions of grasses, seeds, and a quantity of sand. Its flesh forms an excellent article for the table, and the bird itself affords considerable amusement to the sportsman, as pointers will stand to it as to the Land Rail of Europe.

The sexes are so similar in colour and markings that they are not easily distinguishable from each other, and the young at an early age assume the plumage of the adult.

Crown of the head and all the upper surface olive; each feather of the back and scapularies blackish brown in the centre; the feathers at the back of the neck with a double spot of black and white near the edge of each web; a broad stripe of chestnut-red commences at the base of the bill, passes through the eye and unites at the occiput; wing-coverts olive, spotted on the margins with black and white; primaries dark brown, the two outer ones crossed by narrow bars of white, and the remainder with broad bars of dull chestnut-red; stripe over the eye and the chin greyish white, deepening into dark grey on the lower part of the throat; under surface brownish black, crossed by numerous narrow well-defined bars of greyish white; across the breast a broad band of deep sandy buff; thigh and vent buff; under tail-coverts black, barred with white and tipped with buff; bill red at the base, passing into brown at the tip; irides reddish hazel; feet brown.

In some specimens the white spottings of the upper surface are much brighter than in others.

The Plate represents the two sexes of the natural size.